OUTLINING AN ARGUMENT
Instructor: Daniela Sandler

1. Brief Description of in-class writing exercise:
(SEE FULL EXERCISE BELOW.) Collective development of argument outline (thesis, reasons) based on John Trimble's "Middles." Each student will work on parts of the outlines so that everyone contributes a little. Please see the attached assignment sheet for description.

2. Context for the exercise:
In-between drafts for paper #2, discussing how to develop a thesis statement ad draft into a fleshed-out argument.

3. Goal(s) of the exercise:
Exercise reasoning, even for a thesis statement one disagrees with; understand structure of arguments; relate and apply these skills to paper #2.

4. Common results of the exercise:
Students come up with surprisingly strong reasons and claims, even contrary to what they'd said in class - it means they take the opportunity to explore different possibilities and the process (not only final product).

5. Student responses to the exercise:
I haven't gotten any formal feedback yet, but they were engaged and active during the exercise (unlike some workshops when they feel bored or finish hastily).

6. Other Comments:
Other factors that contributed to the success of the workshop:
- Ongoing discussion about workshop topic (debates on World Trade Center memorials) in previous 2-3 classes so students had background they could resort to.
- In the beginning of the semester we had done a similar writing exercise (i.e. continuing a text that someone else had started). On that occasion, the goal was for them to treat writing in a more relaxed, informal way, so I let them be creative and write narratives, nonsense, etc. That went very well, people had fun and it "broke the ice," so I think that made them more open to this workshop (which was more formal).

EXERCISE (Con't next page):
You will work in groups of four. Each person writes down a thesis statement in response to the following question:

What should be done with the site of the Twin Towers?

You don’t need to stick to the thesis statement of your paper. You don’t need to express your final opinion on the question either: this is an exercise, so you can even come up with a thesis statement that is the opposite of what you think. Don’t spend too much time on it – make it simple.

After you’ve got your thesis statement down, you will exchange your statements. You will write the next paragraph of the draft. Your challenge is to develop the thesis statement into the strongest possible argument, even if you don’t agree with it. You will be responsible for what Trimble calls “the middle” of an argument.

Each person will write one paragraph, so that the draft will contain three middle paragraphs. The paragraphs should follow these rules:

1. They should begin with one of the transitional phrases or adverbs listed on page 52 of “Middles.”
2. They should present one reason to hold the opinion contained in the thesis statement.
3. They may present evidence and/or explanation for that reason.
4. They should be simple and short.

Don’t spend too much time polishing your language or elaborating your reason. This is a DRAFT. Your goal is to complete the four drafts as a group, so besides thinking about the argument you’ll also have to consider the dynamics of the group and the time allocated for this activity. Try to be straightforward and more concerned with the reason you are coming up with than with the details of language.

Once everyone has contributed a paragraph, the draft will return to the author of the thesis statement, who will then write down a short conclusion (another paragraph). When writing the conclusion, bear in mind the advice from “Middles” (recapitulate the argument), but also try to avoid merely repeating what has been said.

* Don’t forget to put a title on your draft!